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Proponents of the F-22 fighter plane suffered another major blow Wednesday, after the top Defense appropriator in the House promised to end his effort to continue purchasing the plane.

That signals a likely win for President Obama in his bid to halt production of the jets. But the House Appropriations Committee dealt the president a blow on another priority — closing the detention camp at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

The committee approved by voice vote the \$636.3 billion fiscal 2010 draft defense spending bill, which is \$3.8 billion less than Obama's budget request and includes \$128.3 billion for war operations next year.

The House is expected to take up the spending bill July 30.

John P. Murtha, D-Pa., the chairman of the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, pledged to work to reappropriation \$369 million worth of unrequested F-22 advanced procurement money for 12 new aircraft either through a manager's amendment or possibly through some other floor action. Murtha intends to shift the funding, which for now remains in the bill, to F-22 spare parts and other Air Force maintenance needs. The Air Force already has purchased 187 of the stealthy fighters.

Murtha said that the Senate's 58-40 vote Tuesday to strip its fiscal 2010 defense authorization bill (S 1390) of \$1.75 billion to buy seven more F-22s rendered the House's F-22 funding effort futile.

"That ended the debate," he said, also citing President Obama's pledge to veto any bill that seeks to continue F-22 production. "I'm just realistic. Hell, I like the F-22. I think there is a high risk by not having the F-22 down the road . . . but that's beside the point."

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Daniel K. Inouye, D-Hawaii, who also chairs the Defense subcommittee, indicated Tuesday that he too would honor the Senate vote and not include F-22 funding in his committee's Defense spending bill.

But Murtha defended provisions in the House bill that defy the administration's bid desire to terminate some other large defense programs, such as the VH-71 presidential helicopter program.

"You can't spend \$3.2 billion and get nothing out of it," he said about the VH-71. The bill would allow completion of five helicopters.

Even though the bill would provide funds for war operations in Iraq and Afghanistan at the same time as regular defense funding for the next fiscal year, another war supplemental spending bill will almost certainly be needed in the spring, Murtha predicted.

“They’ve got to accept the fact that they can’t just maneuver around and make it look like they’re not going to have a supplemental,” he said, “They are going to have a supplemental next year.”

Detainee Transfers Blocked

The Appropriations Committee moved Wednesday to effectively bar the Obama administration from moving prisoners from the U.S. Naval Station at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, to the United States for any reason.

The language was added through a manager’s amendment and was crafted by House Appropriations ranking Republican Jerry Lewis, D-Calif., his spokesman said. If enacted, it would thwart the president’s plan to close the prison and complicate the upcoming trials of suspected terrorists in U.S. courts.

The bill already had rejected the administration’s request for \$100 million for the effort to close the Guantánamo prison, but the new language is far more restrictive.

It would bar the administration from spending any money to move any prisoners to U.S. soil until after extensive reporting is completed and would significantly restrict the transfer of detainees to other countries.

“It is essential that Congress stop this administration from rushing to close Guantánamo and transfer or release dangerous terrorists simply to fulfill a campaign promise,” said Lewis. “The bipartisan language included in the amendment prevents a single detainee from being released or transferred until the administration produces an acceptable plan.”

The House could throw a wrench into Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates’s recently announced plan to temporarily expand the military’s ground

force by 22,000 troops for the next three years.

Gates's drive is meant to allow the Army to stop its practice of holding soldiers past their commitments and grant them greater rest time at home in between their overseas deployments.

But Murtha said Gates's plan to fund the multibillion-dollar effort by reprogramming money from other parts of the defense budget was unacceptable. He wants the administration to submit a budget amendment and request the funds formally from Congress.

"When you get into reprogramming, you're starting to hurt the budget as it is," he said. "This is the kind of stuff we are trying to get away from."

Murtha questioned the basic idea of adding troops to the Army for only three years and then dropping down to lower rates.

"I don't know how the hell mechanically and technically they can do it," he said.